



SCHOOL: Chief Joseph School, Great Falls, Montana
DIRECTOR OF SCHOOL FOOD SERVICE: Jennifer Spellman
EXPANDING BREAKFAST PROGRAM: Breakfast in the Classroom

★ BACKGROUND

From zero to 180. Students eating breakfast, that is. Until the 2008-2009 School Year, Chief Joseph School had not offered a breakfast program. When Principal Michelle Meredith urged Jennifer Spellman, district school food service director, to start a traditional school breakfast, Spellman was reluctant. All through the district, she had witnessed poor participation in traditional before-school cafeteria breakfast programs. The only way Spellman was willing to start a breakfast program was to try something new. It was the information provided by the Dairy Council that explained Breakfast in the Classroom that inspired Spellman and Meredith to pilot the program at Chief Jo. They had to convince the Assistant Superintendent this would not disrupt the classroom. There was reluctance, but not any more. Chief Joseph students are eating it up, and Spellman is delighted with both participation and feedback from teachers.

★ IMPLEMENTATION

PTA funded the first week of breakfast for all students so they could learn how the program worked – and tasted. Now students who participate are charged accordingly. Teachers take breakfast and lunch counts as part of attendance. Breakfast is delivered to the classroom on rolling carts and served from baskets. Students select breakfast items and eat at their desks. Teachers use the time to read-aloud or for math minutes so there is no loss in instructional time. A grant from Western Dairy Association allowed the school to purchase a new cooler for the additional milk, yogurt and juice delivered to the classrooms.

★ IMPACT

The breakfast program has decreased morning visits to the health room for stomachaches and headaches and visits to the principal's office are down. Now that children no longer need to sacrifice their play time for breakfast, participation in the school breakfast program exceeds 60 percent. Teachers note that fewer students are tardy or absent since the breakfast program began, and students are more ready to start their school day once the breakfast time is over. Spellman also notes that the program has improved communication between teachers and the school food service department.

★ WORDS OF ADVICE

Meeting with teachers to explain the process before implementing the program and address concerns makes start up easier. It definitely helps to have the principal be the advocate for the program.

Simple changes can make all the difference. For breakfast waste, trash bags are delivered with breakfast. A student carries trash to larger trash cans in the hallway and custodian picks them up later in the morning.

With an average participation of 29 percent for traditional cafeteria breakfast district wide, Spellman is happy with the 60-70 percent participation that Breakfast in the Classroom draws. With such positive feedback, other schools are interested in the program.